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21 April 1986

Mr. John Seigenthaler
Editor, Editorial Page
USA TODAY
1000 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Dear Mr. Seigenthaler:

USA TODAY's 11 April editorial "Too Many Secrets Are Real Security Risk" is disappointing. It dismisses the President and Director Casey's concerns that the disclosure and publication of sensitive information seriously damages the nation's ability to protect its citizens. It also blithely insists that only information provided by this country's traitors to the nation's adversaries is harmful, while the sensitive U.S. national security information the KGB and its cohorts read in the U.S. press is considered to be not damaging. Curious reasoning indeed! The problem is as President Truman put it in a 1951 press conference: "Whether it be treason or not, it does the U.S. just as much harm for those military (and national intelligence) secrets to be made known to potential enemies through open publication as it does for military (and national intelligence) secrets to be given to an enemy through the clandestine operation of spies."

Make no mistake about it, intelligence comes from real people around the world who risk their lives to provide information of benefit to the U.S. and the free world. Intelligence also comes from our allies and from sophisticated technical systems that cost billions of dollars to develop and maintain. Director Casey is charged by law with protecting the identities of these people, the information our allies provide, and the capabilities of our sensitive and expensive technical systems. In most cases that means that the information provided by these sources must be classified, since its publication will enable our adversaries to identify and destroy these assets. In rare instances when source-identifying data can be eliminated or the President deems that it is in the national security interest, intelligence can be officially released and published.

It is unfortunate that USA TODAY cannot differentiate between the very serious damage done to the nation's security through the publication of leaked sensitive intelligence and the need for the American public to possess as much information as possible to make

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informed judgments about the conduct of the government's business. Both concerns are real, different, but clearly not mutually exclusive. There can be freedom of the press and a sensitivity by the press to the need to protect military, diplomatic and intelligence activities that defend this nation. The nation can have both freedom and security, but without security it will have no freedom.

While it is obviously desirable for the press to seek out, publish and criticize malfeasance or nonfeasance on the part of individuals or government entities, it is injurious to the nation's interest for the press to attempt deliberately to ferret out and expose the sources and methods used in intelligence collection. It is equally damaging to publish such information provided by leakers without attempting to determine the degree of damage that will result from such exposure.

USA TODAY and many of the press put the blame for the hemorrhage of secrets on the leakers, but the press itself caters to such leakers, encourages their purposes and then absolves itself from the damage that results to the nation's security from its actions. In short, the press often carelessly tosses about the verbal hand grenades that a leaker hands it. When they explode, killing people and inflicting great damage, the press shrugs and says in effect, well, it's a free country. It seems to those of us in the U.S. national security agencies who are endeavoring to protect this nation's security and thereby its freedoms, including the very freedom the press enjoys, that the press cannot have it both ways. The press is outraged when hostile spies are uncovered in the U.S., but happily conveys equally harmful information to our adversaries by printing very damaging leaks. Why aren't the leakers who have betrayed our government's trust condemned by the press at least to the same extent that it chastizes those who spend thousands of dollars for costly aircraft toilet seats? It seems to us there is a good deal of media hypocrisy in all this.

Director Casey asked that the press of this nation work with CIA and the other national security organizations in protecting this nation's legitimate secrets. Some organizations and individual journalists already do. I strongly encourage the other members of the press to do so too. After all, CIA protects this nation, including all of you in the press. By damaging our capabilities you damage yourself. Let us work together as much as we can for the good of our country.

Sincerely,

George V. Lauder
Director, Public Affairs

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